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Books from Overseas

'THE GRIEF OF BEING A NEGRO'

[*A succinct and important background to West Indies Federation is given in a new collection of essays first delivered at a symposium held at Carleton University.*]

'STATUS in the West Indies is still linked with color or race. To say "I am poor" is almost the same as to say "I am black." . . . To be poor, in West Indian eyes, is to be black; to be white is to be rich; and to be colored is to be somewhere in between, relatively well-off, middle-class.

'In the West Indies color is not mainly a matter of genealogy, as it is in the United States, where everyone with any Negro forebears is by definition, often by statute, a Negro. Nor is color just a matter of skin pigmentation; it includes a constellation of other features, with "blackness" ascribed to qualities thought to be African and "whiteness" to those considered European. But color is more than physiognomic; it also depends on the company one keeps, hence the remarks Lloyd Braithwaite calls typical of working-class Trinidadians: "I don't like too many dark people around me," and "I want somebody to lighten up my complexion."

'In the final analysis . . . color is a matter of culture. Whatever their appearance, middle-class people tend to be considered—and to view themselves as—"colored," while lower-class folk, especially in rural areas, are called "black." In Trinidad, Braithwaite reports in his study of that island, owing to inter-marriage the white group includes some people who "bear fairly marked Negroid characteristics but are by definition white; . . . the term 'Trinidad white' is used [to indicate] that the person described is not really white but passes for white in Trinidad society."

'Many colored people are as wealthy as some whites; many black people hold high political office; social mobility is probably increasing in most of the islands. Nevertheless, it is still true that black folk in the West Indies are generally the poorest and have the lowest status; the small, but increasingly important, middle class is chiefly composed of colored people and special minorities; while the upper class—with the most money, the highest status, and the greatest power—is chiefly confined to a small group of whites and near-whites. Racial composition and social situations vary

from island to island; there are many "poor whites" in Barbados who are not considered upper class, while in Grenada and Dominica, where whites are few, the local elite is predominantly light-colored. But these are minor variations within the general social alignment of classes. As in post-revolutionary Haiti, so in the West Indies: "Tout' nèg' riche c'est mulât', tout' mulât' pauv' c'est nèg'." . . .

'The hierarchy deeply influences the West Indian personality. The whole social fabric is partly knit together by inter-marriage, by acculturation, by assimilation; there is a color-class continuum. And there is one almost universal West Indian value: almost everyone would like to be more white—to be, as a dark-skinned girl wrote to a Trinidad official, "relieved of the grief of being a Negro." Nor are class divisions . . . as evident or as rigid as they once were. But to the extent that clear-cut differences can be identified, upper-, middle-, and lower-class social organization as well as material culture are strikingly disparate. Each section of the population tends to have different goals and ideals, even when certain values seem to coincide. Marital patterns and attitudes illustrate the complexity of the situation. Marriage is the rule in the upper and in the middle class, but the former follow contemporary Western behaviour models, while the latter display Victorian attitudes towards women and matrimony. People in the lower classes establish unions outside marriage at least until middle or old age. Since the lower class is by far the largest, more than two thirds of the children born in the West Indies are illegitimate.'

From THE WEST INDIES FEDERATION: PERSPECTIVES ON A NEW NATION. *Edited by* David Lowenthal. (COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (15*s. net.*)

LITERARY AESTHETICS

[*In his study of modern French, American, and English poetry Professor Ginestier discusses the new material available to the poet in a machine-dominated world.*]

'LITERARY criticism today has been shaken by a storm comparable to that which raged over Victor Hugo's *Hernani* in 1830 and gave rise to a new theater, or to the momentous influence of Symbolism which produced such far-reaching consequences for poetry. On one side are the conservatives who hold to a strict application of the historical method as "the prince of critics," Sainte-Beuve, defined it: "I have often heard modern criticism, and my own in particular, reproached for being entirely historical, entirely

individual. . . . Literature, literary production, is not distinct or separable, for me, from the rest of man. . . . I can enjoy a work of art, but I find it difficult to judge it independently of a knowledge of the man himself. I would say willingly: as the tree, so is the fruit." On the other side are the revolutionaries who recommend silent admiration of masterpieces, grouping themselves behind Paul Claudel who remarked, "The most beautiful is that which you will not understand," and Paul Valéry who wrote in his "Préface à Adonis," "Everything that history can observe is insignificant."

'It seems to us, however, that between the meticulous observation of the rituals of historical method and the admiring silence of the new Quakers of literature, there is room for a method at once more flexible and more thorough. The aesthetician confronted with a masterpiece does not exclude *a priori* any system of explication but tries to make a synthesis of all the means of investigation which the present state of knowledge offers him. This absence of a preconceived idea allows him to reconsider the problem of literary criticism and to take it up again . . . thus rediscovering a prime definition which may be developed into a very useful syllogism:

Language = a succession of symbols.
Literature = a superior form of language.
∴ Everything which helps to shed light upon the symbol and its source sheds light upon literature.

'Two modern sciences—the sociology of primitive life and psychoanalysis—are devoted to the elucidation of human symbols and thus become privileged instruments of aesthetic literary criticism. The weakness of these sciences is that they lend themselves easily to ridicule. As often happens, those who make fun of them attack characteristics which . . . do not belong to the disciplines arraigned. They reproach the sociologists who show an interest in primitive humanity with wanting "to make us walk on all fours," as Voltaire wrote to Rousseau; . . . but is there the least analogy between the idealized depiction of the first man in *The Social Contract* and an organized systematic study of primitive customs such as *The Golden Bough*? In the same way psychoanalysis is stigmatized because it grants too large a place to the libido, and thus becomes an easy mark for irony, e.g., supposing "The Ancient Mariner" to be a poem resulting from unsatisfied sexual desires, our gratitude for this masterpiece ought to go to the puritan Mrs. Coleridge.'

From THE POET AND THE MACHINE. *By* Paul Ginestier. *Translated by* Martin B. Friedman. (UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (40*s. net.*)

HERZEN'S SOCIALISM

[*Alexander Herzen, with Bakunin, was the first Russian socialist to call for a revolt of the masses; and a new study shows how this brilliant writer was led, under the despotism of Nicholas I, to radical programmes.*]

'RIGHT was the exclusive privilege of the gentry: punishment existed only for the peasants. In fact, there was no law or justice in Russia: there was only the arbitrary exercise of brute force, tempered solely by bribery. Memories of all the injustices he had observed in Viatka and Vladimir revived, but illumined by a harsher light than formerly. It was in Novgorod that for the first time Herzen came to reject totally and uncompromisingly the Russian governmental machine and all its works. Significantly for the character of his radicalism, as in Viatka it was not the poverty of the masses or the economic inequality between master and serf which revolted him most, but the absence of all real law, of any defense of the rights of the individual—or, as he himself would have put it, the impossibility of being a "human being." As always it was those aspects of Russian life that offended most of his own aristocratic sense of individual dignity—but not necessarily those that weighed most heavily on the masses—which were the point of departure for his "socialism."

'In fact, the essence of Herzen's socialism as it began to assume mature form in this period can be put in a few simple propositions, none of them economic. All the inhumanity, lawlessness and ignorance of Russian life must perish utterly; not one cursed stone of the old structure must be left to stand, not one institution, one tradition, or one memory. In place of the old a totally new world of justice, humanity, and reason, fully realized to the last iota, must be created. Moreover, until this is accomplished, negation of the old must be total and intransigent, regardless of the consequences to oneself in suffering, exile, and wasted years. Anything less is treason and compromise with the forces of darkness, for only such intransigence, however foolhardy it may appear to the prudent, can cleanse the Augean stables of autocracy and Byzantine barbarism. Finally, although the present generation might perish in the struggle, its martyrs would generate new resistance and in the end enlightenment would triumph, if not in the next generation, then eventually, for such was the inevitable march of history.

'This was the heart of what Herzen meant by "socialism," and indeed what all nineteenth-century Russian radicals meant by it. Programmatically it more often than not had little in common with what went by the same name in the West; but the kernel was the same: intransigent insis-

tence on the full realization of the promises of the Enlightenment. The intransigence of the Russians, however, was more enduring and steadfast than that of their Western brethren, who tended to slide into reformism and compromise with the existing order at the first opportunity. They, of course, had such opportunities much more frequently than the Russians, for the obstacles to the realization of the democratic dream were infinitely more formidable in Russia and the hope for some sort of satisfaction in the present infinitely less than for radicals elsewhere. It was Herzen's generation, and most clearly of all Herzen himself, that first fully expressed this situation.

'It was also in Novgorod that for the first time Herzen's protest began to go beyond himself to embrace somewhat more closely the sufferings of the masses.'

From ALEXANDER HERZEN AND THE BIRTH OF RUSSIAN SOCIALISM 1812–1855. *By* Martin E. Malia. (HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (*72s. net.*)

PRELUDE TO HIROSHIMA

[*The defeat of Japan following the close of the war in Europe is now described by Herbert Feis in the fullest account yet to be published. All available documents have been examined, and an important book has resulted.*]

'By early August little was left standing in the three urban areas that supported Japan's war effort—Tokyo-Kawasaki-Yokohama, Nagoya, and Osaka-Kobe. Most of the essential industrial plants in the smaller towns had been damaged or destroyed. The harbors and channels along the Japan Sea and the Inland Sea were closed by mines. Transit of men and goods in and out of Japan and even between the ports of Japan had diminished to little, to what could be carried on small coastal vessels. The system of protection against American air and naval bombing assaults had collapsed and the organization to control fires after incendiary raids was exhausted. The few remaining large air bases were being smashed and cratered. Over eight million people were homeless and dispersed. After a large air raid the absenteeism from work was between seventy and eighty percent. American airplanes launched from land bases and from naval carriers were able to fly safely over any part of Japan, and shells from our battleships safely cruising within gunfire range of the home islands were compounding the destruction.

'Production of weapons and ammunition was falling fast. Vital raw

materials were scarce. . . . Before the next harvest and winter there was the worrisome prospect of the end of all imports, the burning of crops in the fields, near famine or famine. . . .

'The men around the Imperial Throne would not give in to despair, and continued to look for a chance to retrieve the situation. Some, mainly civilians, clung to the hope that the Soviet government would, if properly rewarded, stay out of the war and act as mediator. Others, the heads of the Japanese military organization that was doomed to extinction, still avowed that they would be able to repel the invasion of Kyushu with great losses to the attacking ships and men, and that when this happened the President and the American military commanders would lose face, and the will of the enemy to accept great losses would break, and thus the American government would be receptive to the idea of a compromise peace.

'The governing American officials knew how damaging their air and naval assaults on Japan were, and how awful the plight of the Japanese people was becoming. But rather than await the gradual descent into helplessness which would lead to unconditional submission, they were in a hurry to bring this about as soon as possible. Impatience to end the strain of war blended with a zest for victory. They longed to be done with smashing, burning, killing, dying—and were angry at the defiant, crazed, useless prolongation of the ordeal. The Japanese government had rejected reasonable conditions of peace. This sustained the impression that no matter what the odds the Japanese might fight on in their homeland until death. There was the problem posed by the presence of large Japanese armies on the mainland of Asia and in various islands in the Central and South Pacific; these might continue to resist after the homeland was occupied. And there was the conjunctive desire of the British to regain control of their territories in South-East Asia.

'These considerations were thought to add up to the conclusion that the use of any means that would bring the war to a quick end was justified—to save lives of Americans and their allies and to save the Japanese from their pitiable folly. Two measures, long in preparation, were about to be taken: dropping the atomic bomb and the entry into the war of a great new antagonist, the Soviet Union. By this time in fact the impetus of both was so great, and the plans for their execution were so complete, that only a most resolute and courageous act of will—of a kind rarely recorded in history—could have stayed them.'

From JAPAN SUBDUED: THE ATOMIC BOMB AND THE END OF THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC. *By* Herbert Feis. (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (30*s. net.*)

KEEPING UP WITH THE *STATUS QUO*

[Research into the influence of television on the lives and education of children in the U.S.A. is summarized in a revealing, sometimes startling book from Stanford.]

'THE medium is extraordinarily hungry for talent and material. Three networks, in the United States, must keep their wires full for a remarkable number of hours per week. A large number of stations must have programs for 16 or more hours a day. Furthermore, these programs must be supported by commercial advertisers (except in the case of educational stations) who pay off in return for audiences to whom they can sell goods or services. Therefore, a successful program on commercial television is first and foremost a program that attracts a large audience. Consequently, it is dangerous for a station or a network to experiment with anything more than slight changes in tried and tested formulas for pleasing large audiences. Rather than trying new things, commercial television tends to do *more* of what has proved successful. . . .

'. . . the whole tendency of the medium, thanks to its advertising base, is not to take a chance. . . . This tendency is reinforced by the scarcity of talent. There simply isn't enough new, fresh, and high-quality talent in the world to fill with fresh and original programs the number of hours that television has to fill. . . .

'So commercial television is a medium that is by its physical nature absorbing, but by its human organization doomed to be repetitious, predominantly shallow, and stereotyped. By its physical nature, it is bound to take up much of the leisure time of people; by its human organization it is bound to be cautious about newness and change. . . . There is a remarkable paper by Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton which most convincingly supports the thesis that the mass media, by their very nature, must work to maintain the *status quo* in society and taste. The media have great sums invested in them, and stand to lose by any great change in taste or standards. They are big business, therefore typically conservative. They face a demand for entertainment which is beyond their ability to meet; therefore, they tend to be extremely repetitive. . . . They dare not do anything that might alienate large segments of their audience. Thus they dare small changes but not fundamental ones; and their whole impact is to retain the *status quo*, not to encourage change.'

From TELEVISION IN THE LIVES OF OUR CHILDREN. *By* Wilbur Schramm, Jack Lyle, Edwin B. Parker, *with a psychiatrist's commentary on the effect of television by* Lawrence Z. Freedman. (STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS.) LONDON: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS. (32*s.* 6*d. net.*)

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